



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Grand Canyon National Park

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Grand Canyon News Release

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Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) used for first time at Grand Canyon National Park

Personal Locator Beacon (PLB) technology was used for the first time at Grand Canyon National Park yesterday evening. It was also the first legitimate use of this technology in the state of Arizona.

A PLB signal was detected in Surprise Valley, a remote location on the north side of the park, by the Air Force Rescue Coordination Center (AFRCC) at Tyndall Air Force Base in Florida. The park received a call about the signal at 6:26 p.m., and park staff responded by helicopter. A hiking party of four people, who had set off the beacon, was found in the area. One person was suffering from dehydration and heat exhaustion and was transported out of the canyon via helicopter. The patient was later transported from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon to Flagstaff via ambulance. The other three members of the hiking party remained in the canyon and were given ice and water by park staff.

When manually activated, a PLB sends out a distress signal, which is detected by satellite and transmitted to the AFRCC, who can then determine the approximate location of the signal. As search and rescue (SAR) personnel head toward and get physically closer to the signal, they can determine a more specific location.

Ken Phillips, Chief of Emergency Services at Grand Canyon National Park, thinks SAR groups will see more of PLB technology, which is now widely available. The use of satellite (SAT) phones, which have the advantage of offering two-way communication, is also on the rise. Although PLBs and other technology, such as SAT phones, can be helpful to people who are in trouble, this technology should never replace planning ahead and being prepared, especially when accessing remote areas, such as Grand Canyon's backcountry.

"A person who carries a PLB should always take the proper measures to prevent themselves from ever having to use it," Phillips said.

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At the Grand Canyon, the Hike Smart educational campaign encourages visitors to follow certain precautions when hiking into the canyon, especially during the hot summer months. These precautions include drinking and eating often, not hiking during the heat of the day, and when possible, staying wet and cool. For more information about hiking at the Grand Canyon and Hike Smart, go to <http://www.nps.gov/grca/planyourvisit/backcountry.htm>.

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